

Dear Council of Bishops:

We are writing out of genuine love and deep concern for our church. We believe that the unity and the future of The United Methodist Church are in jeopardy.

According to *The United Methodist Reporter* “more than 900 UM clergy, in conferences across the country (The United States), have pledged to officiate at same-sex weddings and other services celebrating homosexual unions.” In the same article, the Rev. Bruce Robbins (identified as the originator of this movement) “acknowledged he had been discouraged by failures to effect change in the church’s positions on homosexuality either legislatively or through Judicial Council rulings, and sought a different approach.”

For forty years we United Methodists have listened to each other, respected each other and have engaged in holy conferencing on the important issues of same-sex marriage and the practice of homosexuality. And every four years, our discussions have culminated in General Conference determining the church’s position. Though the discussions and resultant protests have not always been pleasant, there has been the assurance that we would respect the decisions of General Conference and live by the covenant that holds us together. The unity of The United Methodist Church has been preserved as a result of this commitment to holy conferencing and to respecting the decisions of General Conference.

If we take them at their word, at least 900 of those who want to change the *Book of Discipline* regarding same-sex marriage and the practice of homosexuality are no longer willing to honor our Wesleyan way of holy conferencing and respectful dialog. As the article cited above states, the Rev. Robbins and others are encouraging and committed to massive acts of ecclesiastical disobedience, hoping that The United Methodist Church will not possess the resources or the resolve to enforce the church’s position. We are grieved that, evidently, the process of holy conferencing and the mutual respect necessary for good-faith conversations are no longer valued by so many of our colleagues. Their promised actions not only threaten the integrity of our church’s connectional relationships, they undermine any hope of future dialog and prayerfully working out a solution to our church’s seemingly intractable divide.

We do not know how many, if any, marriages or “holy unions” of same-sex couples will be performed by UM clergy in the near future. But we do know the destructive effects that will result in our local churches and throughout the denomination if such services are performed by UM pastors. Even if such acts of disobedience are dealt with appropriately, if they occur in large numbers, the members of our church will simply not understand how such actions are possible. And they will wonder who is allowing them to occur. If pastors performing such services are not dealt with quickly and with genuine consequences for their disobedience, our members will believe that the leadership of the church has failed them. As the Call to Action Committee reported, many of the persons in our pews do not have a high degree of trust in our denominational leaders. How the threatened disobedience is handled will either restore their trust or further weaken it.

What we are sure of is that our members will not support an institution that will not enforce its covenant. Many of us struggle every year to defend to our members why we should pay apportionments that support boards such as the General Board of Church and Society that regularly lobbies and writes legislation to change the church’s position regarding the practice of homosexuality. If we ever come to the point that we are having to explain why the church is not holding those who break the *Discipline* accountable in a real way, we may no longer be able to convince our members of the wisdom of contributing to the general ministries of a church that seems bent on its own destruction. Telling them that we are required to do so by the *Discipline* and by our being a United Methodist congregation will not have much moral force if others are allowed to break the *Discipline* and be unfaithful to our United Methodist positions without meaningful consequences. Some of our members will demand to know why we and our congregations should be required to live by the *Discipline*, if others are not so required.

Honestly, we fear that many of our people will decide that if The United Methodist Church will not live by the covenant that holds us together, it will be time for them to find another church. The positive ministries of transformational discipleship that we are attempting to build are threatened by this group of defiant clergy. This is true even if the threatened disobedience occurs in a different annual conference from our own. What happens in one part of the church affects the perception of the church in all geographical areas.

We are asking you as a Bishop of The United Methodist Church and we are asking the entire Council of Bishops to issue a statement before the threatened disobedience occurs. Please take to heart how much damage will be done to our congregations and to the entire church if Dr. Robbins and others disregard our time-honored process of holy conferencing and respecting the decisions of General Conference. Disobedience to the *Discipline* is the antithesis to holy conferencing and to our United Methodist way. Please lead and issue a statement proactively that the Council of Bishops, regardless of their individual beliefs, will enforce the *Discipline*, will seek appropriate discipline for those who break our covenant, and that the unity and the integrity of the church will be maintained. Such a statement will hearten our members and give us a foundation for calming their concerns and persuading them to remain faithful members of The United Methodist Church.

We sincerely believe that the future of The United Methodist Church is at stake. What Dr. Robbins and others are proposing will lead to anarchy – and the end result will be the demise of the church we love. We write not as members of any board or caucus group, but as United Methodist pastors who have committed our lives to this great denomination and who treasure our Wesleyan heritage. We believe there is a way forward – and that way requires that pastors and congregations live by the *Book of Discipline*, and that our Episcopal leaders maintain its integrity by enforcing it unapologetically.

The Church needs you to lead. We need you to act before the promised disobedience occurs. We need you to issue a public statement that you understand the proposed disobedience to be a grave threat to the unity and the life of the UM Church and that you stand together in your commitment to defend and enforce the *Book of Discipline*. We pray and trust that you will.

Yours in Christ

Originators

Rev. Tom Harrison
Asbury UMC, Tulsa, OK
Oklahoma Annual Conference

Rev. Charles Kyker
Christ UMC, Hickory, NC
Western North Carolina Annual Conference

Rev. Ed Robb III
The Woodlands UMC, The Woodlands, TX
Texas Annual Conference

Rev. Ken Werlein
Faithbridge UMC, Spring, TX
Texas Annual Conference

Rev. Steve Wood
Mount Pisgah UMC, Alpharetta, GA
North Georgia Annual Conference

Signers

Rev. Jorge Acevedo
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Florida Annual Conference

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Rev. Bryan Collier
Orchard UMC, Tupelo, MS
Mississippi Annual Conference

Rev. Robert Collins, Jr.
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Arkansas Annual Conference

Rev. Godfrey Hubert
Foundry UMC, Houston, TX
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Signatures are welcome via the Internet at www.faithfulumc.com or by mailing one's signature (with address, home church, and annual conference name) to:

Bishops Letter Signatures
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